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ABSTRACT

Power, powerlessness, and empowerment have come under increasing scrutiny in recent years. Traditional applications of power tend to be autocratic and autocratic power continues to be accepted extensively in society. Increased use of alternative kinds of power is hindered by lack of skills, lack of opportunity for use, and inappropriate norms which perpetrate autocratic power. For helping professionals, the exercise of power has increasingly significant implications both in personal living and in their professional assistance to clients. Both helper and client growth and development are continually affected by external exercises of power, most frequently by autocratic power, and by their individual ability or inability to use personal power in relating to others. Alternatives to autocratic and manipulative power can play an increasingly constructive role in a complex and rapidly changing world, and these alternatives can be learned. Empowering methodology can encourage increased individual self-assertion and provide opportunity for the fuller development of humanity with reduced use of violence. Learning constructive forms of power appears to require empowering methodology consistent with the learning goal. This document examines concepts of power and development of power in individuals, focusing on the process of developing empowerment models which affirm development of personal power and the exercise of power with respect for others. (NB)

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Power Redesigned:

Identification and Methodology

for

Constructive Power

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Power Redesigned

Power, powerlessness, and empowerment have come under increasing scrutiny in recent years. In Powershift, Toffler (1990) describes this era, the one which began in 1950, as a period when the structure of power that once held the world together is disintegrating. He reviews continuing changes in power which have occurred at every level of human society and the relationship of violence, wealth, and knowledge to these changes.

For helping professionals, the exercise of power has increasingly significant implications both in personal living and in their professional assistance to clients. Both helper and client growth and development are continually affected by external exercises of power, most frequently by autocratic power, and by their individual ability or inability to use personal power in relating to others. Alternatives to autocratic and manipulative power can play an increasingly constructive role in a complex and rapidly changing world, and these alternatives can be learned.

Concepts of power and remedies for powerlessness have been widely explored. Natiello (1990, p. 268-269) reviewed studies of power and found the traditional politics of power to be exploitative and destructive. She finds that relationship arrangements in an authoritarian society foster control and manipulation of persons deemed inferior in relationships. She suggests that changes are needed in definition and function of power and that concern with methodology for arriving at a morality of power are among the needs for developing the changes. Alternatives perceptions of power consistent with a constructive change in the concept of power are found in the field of psychotherapy (e.g., May, 1972) and in organization development (e.g., Block, 1987). Both May and Block apply their efforts to practice as well as theory. Malcolm S. Knowles and Associates (1985), among others, offers methodology appropriate for constructive change through assumptions which reduce the effect of a superiority/inferiority dichotomy in the learning process itself.

Concepts of power and development of power in the individual will be examined in the following sections. Focus will be on the process of developing empowerment models which affirm development of personal power and exercise of power with respect for others.

Power and powerlessness

May (1972) in his classic Power and Innocence examines kinds and levels of power in his exploration of sources of violence. Viewing power and its exercise as natural components of being human, his thesis is that violence occurs when a person cannot live out needs for power in normal ways. He finds love, with its components of caring and valuing of the other, to be exercised in conjunction with the kinds of power found at the higher levels. He disagrees with those who see love as the denial of power. Kinds of power, listed in ascending order, are exploitative (with violence or the threat of it), manipulative (power over another), competitive (power against another), nutrient (power for another), and integrative (power with another). Integrative power is exercised by persons who are equal in their interaction and who exert their power fully. Growth occurs through the dialectic process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. As an example, an individual might ask and get extensive, direct criticism for an essay, discuss it, and improve the paper as a result, retaining the final choice of expression as the writer. Competitive power is the threshold of positive and negative power. It is appropriate in some circumstances as its presence stimulates persons to do their best. It is not appropriate in many circumstances and its extensive use shrinks the size of the human community in which competitors lives. Constructive statesmanship or parenting exemplify the nutrient kind of power, and the con man exemplifies manipulative power.

The power to be is the basic level of power, according to May, and is succeeded by the phase of self-affirmation, with its call for survival with esteem. When self-affirmation is confronted by opposition, it becomes self-assertion. Self-assertion which is blocked

over time is replaced by aggression, which can occur appropriately or inappropriately in varying situations. "When aggressive tendencies are completely denied to the individual over a period of time, they take their toll in a zombielike deadening of consciousness, neurosis, psychosis, or violence.(May, 1972, pp. 42-43)."

Block (1987) provides provides three elements especially germane to the development of constructive forms of power in The Empowered Manager. In examining conditions in the work world, he contrasts the cycle found in a bureaucracy with that found in an entrepreneurial relationship. The bureaucrat chooses maintenance, caution, and dependency, while the entrepreneur chooses greatness, courage, and autonomy. The bureaucratic cycle begins with a patriarchal contract in which one agrees to submit to authority, deny self-expression, sacrifice for unnamed future rewards, and believes this to be a just contract (p. 24). The cycle is continued through myopic self-interest by the employee who sees moving up the hierarchy as being more important than service and contributions through meaningful work. Manipulative tactics, the third aspect of the cycle, serve the goal of self-interest well. The tactics are tolerated or even admired in the bureaucratic organization. The result of these three steps is dependency, which reinforces the patriarchal contract. Block notes that persons are prepared well for the patriarchal contract through years of being treated fundamentally as children by schools and family. Power in the bureaucratic cycle appears to be exercised primarily in the lower kinds of power described by May.

Carl Rogers (Kirschenbaum and Henderson, Eds., 1989, pp. 178-199), in a dialogue with Gregory Bateson, agrees with Block's reference to conventional schooling, finding virtues of democracy being praised but not practiced. Rogers criticizes conventional education for its top down approach, with control from above and with knowledge flowing down to supposedly receptive students who are best governed by being kept in anxiety or

fear. He cites exams, grades, criticism in front of the class, and the threat of poor recommendations as methods to keep students in anxiety.

The entrepreneurial contract requires one to be his/her own authority, to encourage self-expression, to make commitments, and to believe that this is a just contract (Block, 1987, p. 66). Managers who use this contract place emphasis on what is best for the enterprise rather than on submission to authority. Entrepreneurial contracts lead to enlightened self-interest in which meaning, contribution, service, integrity, and positive impact take priority over the myopic self interest of pleasing someone in a higher position. Authentic tactics, rather than manipulation, are used in pursuit of the meaningful tasks undertaken. Authenticity allows for sharing information, using language which describes reality, and the avoidance of repositioning for the sake of acceptance. The entrepreneurial contract appears to be consistent with May's integrative power as described above.

Block (1987, pp.101-116) says, that in choosing autonomy, the most fundamental choice to make is to create one's own future. The creation of a vison of greatness in one's function is the first step toward empowerment, and it serves to claim that autonomy. The vision should be strategic in that it focuses on persons served in the marketplace, and it should be lofty enough to capture one's spirit and imagination. Nothing short of greatness is sufficient, since greatness eliminates the hedging which could allow one to return to the dependency of a patriarchal contract. A vision of greatness is beyond mission statements, goals, and objectives.

Block (1987, pp. 130-151) outlines a plan for negotiating trust and agreement with others to support one's vision. Built on a matrix of trust and agreement, negotiation approaches vary according to whether the "other" is an adversary, fence-sitter, bedfellow, ally or opponent. Integrity is maintained with all of them by stating one's vision and one's understanding of the position of the other.

Further mention may be made of empowerment which may be fostered externally. Maeroff (1988), Senior Fellow at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, reviewed efforts at reforming education during the past decade and found many efforts which disempowered teachers. Included were the inordinate number of assignments not related to the teaching function, the lack of time for development, a bureaucratic system, and a continuing lack of status as viewed from outside the profession. He called for teachers to have meaningful influence, not just involvement. His review of the CHART program and its ability to empower teachers led him to see empowerment as somewhat synonymous with professionalization. He found empowerment had three guiding principles: boosting status, increasing knowledge, and providing access to power. He recommended partnerships outside the education establishment to help overcome the disempowering factors within education. He noted that teachers' efforts to claim their power were tied to their work with unions.

Natiello (1990) proposes collaborative power as a replacement for authoritarian power. Relationships with collaborative power are characterized by openness, responsiveness, dignity, personal empowerment, alternating influence, and cooperation rather than competition. She sees the concept of shared power implicit in Rogers' person-centered approach. Barriers to the use of collaborative power by facilitators (and perhaps others with designated responsibilities) include entrenched societal values supporting authoritarianism, abdication of personal power in an effort to serve others, failure to self-disclose, distrust in the actualizing tendency of the group, and an intention to remain outside the group. Barriers for participants include expectations, values about the role of the facilitator, belief in the scarcity of power, fear of the unknown, a negative image of power, inexperience, and habit.

Methodology for Empowerment

Power has been seen to be both negative and positive, constructive and destructive, and changing with changes of events. Constructive or higher levels of power may be integrative, collaborative, or entrepreneurial. These have as common components a respect of others and an openness to them, respect for self, a basis in personal knowledge and acknowledgement that others have contributions as well, skill, and a willingness to work with others as equals. No one claims that constructive kinds of power are common, expected, or even widely understood. Initiation of constructive power may be made more easily by one who has an assigned responsibility as superior or as equal. Constructive kinds of power can also be initiated by anyone who has knowledge and skills on one hand and a willingness to choose risk on the other. The response to self-assertion may demand that aggression be used appropriately or inappropriately or allow constructive assertion of power to be used.

It is clear that increased knowledge and skills in effective use of power, especially constructive power, are needed. One form of learning comes through an individual or group's assertion of power with disregard for consequences, even if violence be involved. This response may even be deemed necessary under some circumstances. Another approach to learning is to learn constructive power in more typical learning situations of the counseling session, in the classroom, in the inservice session, through training programs, and through consultation. Methodology and facilitation utilizing empowerment techniques consistent with the goals of learning will be required.

Rogers' classic Freedom to Learn (1969) was among early applications of integrative power as applied to education. Rogers sought a system by which education could change from a system focused on teaching to one focused on facilitating self-directed learning. Rogers' method was applied to a wide variety of groups, with different ages and different purposes. Some of his guidelines for facilitation of learning (p. 164-166) were that the

facilitator, through trust, helped to create the learning experience; the facilitator elicited and clarified the purposes of individuals; the facilitator relied on the desire of students to implement purposes which had meaning for them; the facilitator made available a wide range of resources; the facilitator served as a flexible resource; the facilitator accepted the intellectual content and the emotionalized attitudes of participants; the facilitator became a participant learner, sharing without imposing and alert to expressions of deep or strong feelings of others; and the facilitator accepted and recognized his/her own limitations. Most listing of facilitative skills since that time paraphrase and extend this listing and would equally apply to methodology necessary for learning constructive kinds of power.

Another methodology consistent with learning constructive uses of power is found in Malcolm S. Knowles and associates' Andragogy in Action (1984). The process of andragogy is contrasted with the more prevalent process of pedagogy. Pedagogy assumes that the learner is dependent, that transmission techniques (lecture, audio-visual, etc.) are important because the learner has little experience, that readiness is related to the content required for advancement, that the curriculum is subject-centered and organized according to logical units, and that motivation is externally determined by such factors as competition for grades or concern over the consequences of failure. The andragogical model assumes that the learner is self-directed, that the adult learner's experiences are better served by individual learning plans such as learning contracts, that the need to know constitutes a readiness to learn, that adults learn in order to reach a goal such as performing a task or living in a more satisfying way, and that internal motivation has priority over external motivation.

Knowles and Associates (1984) use the following factors in their process design: physical and psychological climate setting, mutual planning, involvement of participants in self-diagnosis, involvement of learners in developing learning objectives, involvement of

learners in designing the learning plans, assistance to learners in carrying out their plans, and involvement of learners in evaluating their objectives.

Daniels (1986) offers a review of various procedures and methods for group work which exemplify the equal aspect in learning and which provide practice in application of shared power. Daniels promotes a norm state where all members have equal influence and suggests the first few minutes of a meeting provides the greatest opportunity to affect the norm state. He uses an inclusion activity which provides for each group member to act like each other member during the first two minutes.

Conclusion

Traditional applications of power tend to be autocratic. Empowering methodology can encourage increased individual self-assertion and provide opportunity for the fuller development of humanity with reduced use of violence. Autocratic power continues to be accepted extensively in society, and increased use of alternative kinds of power is hindered by lack of skills, lack of opportunity for use, and inappropriate norms which perpetuate autocratic power. Means of empowerment are available to members of the helping profession and through them to their clients. Learning constructive forms of power appears to require empowering methodology consistent with the learning goal.

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